

Aristocratic Marriage, Adultery and Divorce in the Fourteenth Century: The Life of Lucy de Thweng (1279–1347), by Bridget Wells-Furby. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2019. Pp. xi+246. ISBN: 9781783273676.

In this work independent scholar Wells-Furby uses Lucy de Thweng, niece of the important Yorkshire baron Marmaduke de Thweng, as the axle around which to build a wheel of other contemporary women whose life stories matched certain key aspects of her own. Lucy is a very interesting subject to study. A thrice-married woman, Lucy divorced her first husband, William Latimer, carried on a years-long relationship with a man, Nicholas Meinill, whom she never married but with whom she had a son, was probably abducted and forced into marriage by husband number two, Robert de Everingham, was rescued and protected by Meinill until Everingham died, lived as a widow for eleven years, during which time both Latimer and Meinill died, and ended her life as the wife of Bartholomew de Fanacourt. Lucy's adventures in the marriage mart earned her a notorious reputation in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries—a period with a rather surprising number of notorious ladies—as well as the kind of nudge-nudge-wink-wink smarminess that some male historians enjoy bringing to the discussion of medieval elite women and their activities and experiences. Wells-Furby states from the beginning that her intention is to reassess and revise Lucy de Thweng's historical reputation and to include her in the panoply of medieval women who have been subjects of books, articles, and essays in the last two decades.

Wells-Furby is an exemplary archivist, as evidenced by the meticulous care in which she engaged in her archival and primary source research for this study, as well as her splendid editions of the *Catalogue of the Medieval Muniments at Berkeley Castle* (Gloucestershire Record Series volumes 17 and 18, The Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2004) and *The Great Cartulary of Berkeley Castle, c. 1425* (Gloucestershire Record Series volume 28, The Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2014). Her notes and primary source bibliography will be very useful to any scholar wanting to investigate not just Lucy de Thweng further, but also the two dozen or so other women she utilizes as points of comparison and illumination. Methodologically and analytically, however, alas, this work falls short.

The discussion of women who engaged in the social and sexual adventures of Lucy and her cohort—divorcees and adulteresses, abducted women and landed widows—has no real methodological form. A prosopographical study of such women at a specific point in time, complete with charts, tables, and some basic

statistical analysis, would have been a good approach to the topic, and it would have highlighted Lucy better. Instead, each chapter is entirely descriptive, with examples ranging from the mid-thirteenth to the fifteenth century in no particular order. This makes reading each chapter tedious and confusing. There are no appendixes to be able to reference in order to quell the confusion that this kind of approach creates. Some genealogical tables do appear in the book, but there is no clear rationale for producing the ones that appear and ignoring all of the other unillustrated genealogical material. Each chapter does return to Lucy, but there are no concluding resolvable reasons why that might be the case, other than the author's stated purpose of writing some kind of biographical study, however attenuated or paltry the source material might be. The final chapter, titled "Summary and Conclusions" highlights what is absent in this study: a real assessment of the ways in which women as individual thinkers in culturally contextualized settings fought, connived, and schemed to retain some kind of personhood despite the law, social norms, and "patriarchal equilibrium" (as Judith Bennett would say).

The problems, as this reviewer sees them, are that the secondary sources absorbed by the author were inadequate. There are few references to the myriad works on medieval women and feminist theory that have been published in the last fifteen years and no references to studies, such as have appeared in journals like this one and *Medieval Prosopography*, that delineate methodologies historians of women have found useful. I am sympathetic to authors who are working in areas where libraries might not be adequate to the task of providing new works (especially UK libraries' apparent aversion to purchasing the books of American authors), but the online resources available through the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship and the Gender and Medieval Studies group are incredibly easy to access and, much of them, free to use. Even a small toe-dip into some of these resources would have produced helpful examples of interpretive models that could have made this more than a work of description.

If this book had been published twenty-five years ago, it would have been a good example of the kinds of groundbreaking archival research being conducted by historians of women who were still digesting feminist theory, social science methodologies, and the frustrations of having few secondary sources from which to draw. Even fifteen years ago, this work would have been a solid contribution to the growing body of scholarship on medieval women. Published in the midst of so many other books about medieval women that are really breaking new ground while being devoted to intensive archival research, Wells-Furby's book seems somewhat anachronistic.

Even so, this reviewer urges people to take Wells-Furby seriously as a scholar of the archives. What is valuable in her book is the sheer volume of material she presents. Each chapter's footnotes are teeming with excellent fodder for others to utilize in their explorations of later medieval elite women, marriage, and land—and her contributions to future work should be acknowledged. Her understanding of the ways in which British public and private documents “work” is beyond reproach. Wells-Furby might not present a great book about the ways in which Lucy de Thweng and her contemporaries navigated their relationships with family, spouses, king, and court but she did produce a tour-de-force of archival research that can stand as a model for how such research ought to be conducted: thoroughly, fearlessly, and intensively. And that is not such a bad thing.

Linda E. Mitchell
University of Missouri–Kansas City